How could I possibly lend a deaf ear to such expert advice? Even though I might not be equipped to contribute more than an insignificant pebble to the linguistic pyramid, I yet felt stimulated by his words, and to a certain extent committed. Later, while I cudgeled my brain in an effort to untangle and isolate some rule from that mass of words which I had been able to collect, I would every now and then be successful and the resultant feeling of delight in accomplishment would be augmented by the anticipation of the further delight which would be mine when I returned to Buenos Aires and presented my findings to Gutiérrez and talked at length with him.

He was a man of great natural talent which had been magnified by deep erudition. Love of the arts and sciences was uppermost in his life. His tolerance was proportional to his vast knowledge and his free way of thinking. He was affable in manner, which was fitting to one who owed everything to his own efforts and who had experienced all of life's vicisitudes. At seventy and in his lofty literary and administrative position he knew how to inspire, even if with just a word, the most modest student, and to listen to and discuss with the most cordial deference the problems of the least of those who visited him, which is not such a common thing among men of his age and knowledge.

But the pleasure of speaking to him again was to be denied me. On my return the news which caught my attention in the first newspaper which I bought after landing was that of his death, which had occurred on the eve of my arrival!

May your memory, oh Gutiérrez, remain ever as alive and lasting in the hearts of your countrymen as it is in the heart of the author of these lines, who will preserve it in all its freshness! Be pleased to accept as dedicated to you, and protect with your name, the few paltry lines which I may write in the following pages on the subject of the Indian languages -- for it is to you that I owe them, and without you as patron I would not have dared to publish them!

II

Beginnings of the work. Particulars of a personal nature.

At the beginning of my labors I had but little hope of crowning my efforts with any success. We had on board with us an Indian

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who claimed to be a Mataco, [233] and whom I immediately 124
pressed into service by asking him the names of the different garments we were wearing and the objects which surrounded us. But the man would soon tire after I had asked him just a few words. It was evident that intellectual exertions, be they ever so light, were not for him. Whenever I would ask him the same word twice he would give me to understand that he had already told me and, picking up my notebook, would turn the few written pages it contained and find the right one and point out the general area in which the word alluded to was to be found. And yet I could have sworn that he was looking in some other direction while I was writing! When it is mentioned amongst us that someone is "acting the part of an Indian" -- in the sense that he is pretending to be unaware of what is going on -- a very great truth is affirmed.

With all this I was able to advance little or nothing in my 124
work.

But when a few days later we were harangued by the Toba chief, who seemed to be barking rather than talking, then I became absolutely convinced that I must keep to my own field of knowledge and not wander innocently into others, so useless did it seem to me even to attempt to make any sense out of those barks.

Man, however, proposes and circumstance disposes. A few days later we ran aground, and as we were unable to continue on our way I had ample spare time at my disposal to make use of as I saw fit. The Indians milled about on the land beside the ship. Many chiefs came to see us and we could not understand a word of what they said to us...here then was my opportunity, and I made ready to take full advantage of it.

The Indian is distrustful by nature and does not want out- 115
siders to learn his language, but among them was one Faustino, 124
a Christian [Text unclear as to whether this man was a "Christian Indian" who had given up his religion and returned to his own people, or a "Christian white" who had taken up with the Indians -- Translator.] who had gone over to them, and I, by stealth and without the Indians' knowing it, began to question him. However, I did not find this at all satisfactory, finding so much apparent

confusion in the words when they were strung into sentences and attributing the difficulty to Faustino's little understanding of the matter in hand. At last we were able to establish more friendly relations with the Indians by dint of our frank and open treatment, my continual and almost reverential repetition of their words as though they were precious things whenever an opportunity offered and, finally by the judicious distribution of a few gifts all of which, in combination, made them lose their wariness, especially in the case of the younger ones who then outdid themselves in telling me, of their own volition, the name of every object I cared to ask about. 115 124

But it was really strange: a word, when repeated, would change and be different for no apparent reason. At times its vowel sounds would seem separate, at others dipthonged, to the extent that if one of the two component sounds were stressed more than the other, neither one would agree. Often the change was in the syllable itself, so to speak, while on occasion there would be either a gain or a loss of a syllable. [Original version garbled--Translator] 124 [115]

One morning we made a test with Natalio Roldán. We spent a quarter of an hour establishing between us which was the true [234] sound which was to be reproduced with Spanish signs, and whether it was this sound or some other which had come through in a given word. This vagueness and lack of certainty confirmed Roldán in his opinion that the Mataco language was an enigma which could not be transcribed, was devoid of rules, and could not be learned, as the Missionary Fathers (who were established in Christian territory near the frontier) themselves had affirmed.

My ear, however, becoming accustomed to these new sounds, brought me slowly to the realization that the Mataco tongue was not after all that wild, untamable mustang which people would have one believe. This I realized while only as yet being able to isolate the sounds, for I could not at that time comprehend the reasons behind certain syllabic changes.

I decided to take a new tack and avoid all pretentious arguments on the subject, channelling my efforts into accumulating sentences, examining and comparing them later in order to be

I am aware that the ethnological material I gathered among the Matako is too disconnected and fragmentary to be published by itself. I prefer to present it as I obtained it, as notes to the tales. We know so little about the Matako ethnology that even incomplete as these documents are they may be useful and seem to me worth publishing. 114

The myths and tales published here were transmitted to me by two informants, Pedro and Martin. Both spoke fairly good Spanish and had lived for many years in contact with white men or mestizoes without breaking their ties with the tribes. Of the two informants Pedro was the more deeply merged in native life. He had his hut near the little village of Las Lomitas, the station of the new railway between Formosa and Embarcación. His hut betrayed the initiative of its owner and his will to accept and adapt himself to new conditions. It was built according to the usual Argentinian pattern and very little in it denoted that the inhabitants were Indians. Despite the trarsformation of the old grass shack into a wooden hut, however, and the iron household wares, the life of Pedro and his family and his neighbors continued in the old pattern. One compartment of the hut was devoted to a mourning wife who observed complete seclusion. Every evening the small hamlet, from which one could see passing trains, was filled with the hoarse grunts of medicine-men. Near the modernized settlement other Indians of the same stock had built a grass village in the ancient fashion and bows and arrows were stuck into the ground ready for hunting or fishing. Pedro was a very intelligent fellow who realized the advantages of learning Spanish and of buying iron instruments from the stores, but he had not lost the sentiments of an Indian. He felt deeply the injuries inflicted upon him daily by white men. Pedro had an open mind, a great sense of dignity and justice, and a deep desire to improve his condition and that of his family. He was as friendly and kind as most Indians are when they do not assume the attitude of beaten dogs. 115

Martin was an entirely different personality. He was very

old—the oldest Indian in the mission I believe. Esteemed by everyone, he had developed a consciousness of his respectability that was sometimes a bit comic. He spoke with poise, choosing elegant and sophisticated words the meanings of which he never really understood. His language was a slight parody on the affected speech of certain colonists. In his youth he had lived with his tribe which was still independent of and untouched by European civilization, but later in life, like many intelligent Indians, he deemed it useful and convenient to join the white settlers for a while. He was among the first natives to help the missionaries and became one of the first and best Christians of the Missions. Martin's long contact with mestizo settlers and later with missionaries made of him an informant of lesser value than Pedro. His tales were generally twisted so that they would fit to the new type of living which had developed in Martin's community. In working with me he tried to rationalize the old lore of his tribe as if I were a colonist with no experience in Indian ways. However, his contribution is valuable because he was an old man extremely well informed in primitive customs of his tribe.

Martin's tales are not all Indian, although I expressed to him several times my desire to have only native lore. He told me many tales of distinctly European origin. He always insisted that they were known by other Indians and consequently were genuine. As some of these European tales had been told my be Pedro who also denied their foreign source, one may consider them as having been incorporated into the modern folklore of the Indians. Often Indian elements as well as Indian characters in such tales (for instance, the Rainbow playing the part of an Ogre) point out that European motifs have been worked up by the native story tellers and readjusted to the environment. For that reason I feel that tales of recent introduction should not be neglected. They may give precious hints as to the diffusion of European stories among the natives of America, and indicate the way they have been integrated into native culture. The intro-

6:Métraux E-5 (no date) 1943 S17 Mataco S17

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estos indios que están acosados por una situación económica de día en día más difícil y que fuera de las misiones están sometidos a múltiples vejámenes y humillaciones. No obstante no se han observado crisis de suicidio entre los demás indios del Chaco argentino que viven bajo condiciones igualmente desfavorables. Hay también indicios de que los casos de suicidio eran comunes al principio de la era de las misiones y esto puede hacernos suponer que el suicidio era la expresión tradicional de la agresión en contra de los miembros de su grupo contra los cuales el individuo no podía vengarse en otra forma. El ejemplo dado por un suicida se hace contagioso y de allí nacen epidemias esporádicas de envenenamiento.

762 The high rate of suicide among the Matako Indians of the Argentine Gran Chaco is a social phenomenon well worth our attention. In this tribe suicide at times assumes the character of an epidemic that causes havoc among the people and is a serious problem for the [797] English missionaries who have several stations along the Bermejo and Pilcomayo Rivers. To these missionaries, especially to Dr. Collins [115] Smith and J. White, I am indebted for most of my information on the suicidal mania that has flared up on several occasions during the past ten years. Personally, I have witnessed only one case. Information about suicide among the Matako who live in the bush or as miserable hilotes around the white settlements is not available, but there is little doubt that if the Matako in the missions are so prone to take their lives, those who find themselves exposed to hunger and mistreatment will be even more inclined to end their days wilfully.

Suicide among the Matako takes a strictly patternized form. In all cases known to me, the victims poisoned themselves by eating the [824] fruits of the sachasandia (Capparis salicifolia Griseb). This fruit, the size of a walnut, grows on a tree which is very common in the Chaco region between the Bermejo and Pilcomayo Rivers. It ripens in December, the period which coincides with the largest number of 262 suicides. Strangely enough, the sachasandia is also an important food for the chaco Indians; it is collected in the summer, dried in 251 the sun and stored in caraguata bags to be consumed during the lean winter months. Even dried these fruits are extremely poisonous and 252 before eating them the Indians boil them six or seven times in different waters.

The clinical symptoms of sachasandia poisoning are: convulsions, 762 foaming at the mouth and, finally, coma. The heart beat becomes 164 jerky with short stops and upsurges of activity. The muscles of the throat are affected with paralysis and the patient makes a gurgling sound. When paralysis sets in, no emitic can be taken orally. The last phase of the agony is characterized by jumpy motions of the body